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“Courage, then, my countrymen, our contest is not only whether we ourselves shall be free, but whether there shall be left to mankind an asylum on earth for civil and religious liberty.”
Samuel Adams

California State Senator Drops (Most of) Proposal That Threatened Freedom of Religious Colleges

California State Senator Ricardo Lara decided last week to [drop language](#) from his controversial bill that would have violated the freedoms of religious colleges and universities. SB 1146 caused great concern among religious higher education institutions, as it tied government funding—including student grants and scholarships—to conformity with the state’s LGBT non-discrimination laws and policies. Specifically, the bill took away the option for a religious exemption to non-discrimination laws regarding sexual and moral conduct, providing an exception only for religious vocational schools. Additionally, the bill created a special private right of action avenue for LGBT students to file lawsuits if they felt they were discriminated against. The language specified that any school that did not abide by the government’s non-discrimination policies would lose funding from the Cal Grant program, a state-funded scholarship program which provides aid for thousands of low-income students attending many of California’s religious colleges. The egregious provisions sparked a tremendous outcry from religious leaders and institutions, not just in California but also from across the nation. These opposed the bill on the grounds it would eliminate religious liberty and educational diversity and opportunity. Yielding to the pressure, Sen. Lara, the bill’s sponsor, removed the most egregious language, leaving only disclosure requirements for religious institutions. While this is a significant victory for religious liberty in higher education, religious leaders are cautious in offering full support for the changes, since the disclosure requirements are still burdensome, possibly could threaten educational privacy laws, and still send the not-so-subtle message that the schools are somehow doing wrong. Specifically, the new language requires religious schools to report if they claim any exemption from state and federal non-discrimination laws. This includes the Title IX exemption which many schools sought after the Department of Education redefined *sex discrimination* to include gender identity and sexual orientation. Additionally, the [amended bill requires](#) religious schools to report any student expulsions and suspensions, and to provide a “detailed explanation” which gives the reason for the disciplinary action, an “explanation of the policy the student violated and whether that policy is authorized under the exemption,” and to indicate if the student was a Cal Grant recipient. Sen. Lara has indicated that this information will help him determine what kind of “discriminatory” actions are actually occurring, so that he can introduce another bill next legislative session to address these issues. The current amended bill will likely receive a vote this week in the California State Assembly, followed by a vote in the state senate, after which it will be sent to the governor’s desk for his signature or veto.

States Collaborate to Create Social-Emotional Learning Standards

Eights states have agreed to work together to create and implement new [social-emotional learning \(SEL\) standards](#), an effort championed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)). The mission of CASEL is “to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school,” with a focus on five competencies: self-awareness, self-

management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Currently, all states have SEL standards for pre-K, but only three have implemented SEL standards through high school (IL, KS, and WV). Proponents believe these standards should be incorporated into traditional curriculum like math and English, and some think SEL assessment could be included as an indicator of a school's success as required by the accountability system put in place by the new education law, ESSA. However, researchers have recognized there are difficulties in getting an objective measurement of social and emotional learning, and some groups have expressed concerns about the standards being used for social engineering purposes.

Military Court Rules Against Religious Freedom of Marine

Last Wednesday, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces—the military's highest court—[ruled](#) 4-1 against a marine's right to have Bible verses visible at her workstation. The marine, [Monifa Sterling](#), simply inscribed several Bible verses onto three placards and set them on her desk; when she was ordered to remove them she refused and was court-martialed soon after. First Liberty Institute, a religious liberty organization, will be representing Ms. Sterling in her appeal. Kelly Shackelford, president of First Liberty Institute, said in a statement, "A few judges decided they could strip a marine of her constitutional rights just because they didn't think her beliefs were important enough to be protected. If they can court-martial a marine over a Bible verse, what's to stop them from punishing service members for reading the Bible, talking about their faith, or praying?" The case is to be appealed before the U.S. Supreme Court. Saying what might be expected, Mikey Weinstein, longtime crusader against religious expression by military personnel, claims the case is unlikely to be heard by the Supreme Court.

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Don't Miss the AACCS National Legislative Conference, September 12-14, 2016](#)

[A Rough Road Ahead for Religious Liberty, World Missions](#)

[Study: School Choice Saves Money for Public School Districts](#)

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